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SUBJECT: ASEAN -- INDONESIANS PRAISE U.S. ENGAGEMENT BUT  
SKEPTICAL REGARDING BURMA

REF: JAKARTA 962 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Dep/Pol/C Daniel A. Rochman, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In the wake of the Phuket ministerial, Indonesian officials continue to praise U.S. commitment to ASEAN and underscore the regional organization's central place in Indonesian foreign policy. However, Indonesia continues to press for more aggressive human rights mechanisms within the organization. Many Indonesian ASEAN watchers, both inside and outside of government, remain skeptical of ASEAN's ability to promote democracy and human rights--especially in Burma. As a result, Indonesian legislators and civil society activists are pursuing a range of track-two initiatives to press for reform in Rangoon. END SUMMARY.

PRAISE FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT

¶2. (SBU) Indonesian officials have praised the United States' commitment to ASEAN in light of the Secretary's recent participation in recent ASEAN-related meetings in Phuket, Thailand. Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU) officials told us that U.S. accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) marked a "new era" in U.S. engagement with the regional organization. They also praised the Secretary's commitment to establishing a U.S. diplomatic mission to the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta.

ASEAN STILL CENTRAL

¶3. (SBU) FM Wirajuda and other DEPLU officials moved quickly to reaffirm ASEAN's central place in Indonesian foreign policy in response to media reports of Indonesian anger over the relatively weak terms of reference adopted for the ASEAN Human Rights Body. FM Wirajuda's strong comments calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi also fueled speculation that Indonesian officials were losing patience with ASEAN. During a July 31 media briefing, FM Wirajuda downplayed any controversy. He said that Indonesia would not have endorsed the terms of reference if it did not believe they would help advance human rights and democracy in the regional body. FM Wirajuda also underscored the importance of ASEAN to Indonesia.

¶4. (C) Privately, DEPLU officials told us they are not completely satisfied with the organization's human rights mechanisms. Indonesia is particularly concerned that the ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB) lacks the ability to investigate human rights violations and has no mechanism to protect victims of such violations, according to George Lantu, DEPLU's Deputy Director for ASEAN Political and Security Cooperation. Lantu told poloff that the GOI only agreed to the terms of reference (TOR) after other ASEAN

members agreed that the TOR was subject to review--and possible change--in five years. Indonesia would also press for strong language on protection and promotion of human rights to be included in the political statement ASEAN will issue during AHRB's planned October launch.

#### SKEPTICS REMAIN

15. (C) The controversy tapped into a deep vein of ASEAN skepticism among segments of the Indonesian foreign policy elite. Rizal Sukma, Executive Director of the Indonesian Center for Strategic and International Studies, told poloff that while the AHRB was toothless, at least it was a concrete step toward a substantive role on human rights for ASEAN. Nevertheless, he said it would likely take least 10 to 15 years before the AHRB had any real enforcement mechanism. Likewise, on Burma, Sukma was pessimistic that any combination of ASEAN incentives nor punishments would produce movement toward democracy by the regime and said it was time for Indonesia to break from ASEAN consensus to avoid being continually "tarnished" on Burma.

#### TRACK TWO INITIATIVES MOVE FORWARD

16. (SBU) Indonesian parliamentarians and NGO activists, long critical of ASEAN's tepid commitment to human rights and democracy, are pursuing initiatives of their own. One of these will be Burma-focused conference sponsored by ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) slated for August 12-13 in Jakarta. AIPMC officials said they chose Jakarta because of Indonesia's successful democracy. (Note: Although based in Kuala Lumpur, AIPMC maintains a coordinating office

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in Jakarta that will take the lead organizing the conference.) Key pro-democracy parliamentarians and civil society organizations will play a key role in setting up the conference.

17. (C) NGOs hope to use the conference to encourage more vigorous ASEAN action on Burma, according to Rafendi Djamin, head of the NGO Indonesia Solidarity for Burma (SIB). Djamin told poloff that NGOs would urge ASEAN governments to call for Aung San Suu Kyi's immediate release. They will also press the Burmese on the treatment of minority groups, including the Rohingyas and urge ASEAN to establish an independent human rights commission, including a commissioner from Burma.

18. (C) The ASEAN Secretariat is also moving establish a track-two human rights mechanism (8Q, research and policy advice on human rights matters. A group of academics, parliamentarians and NGO activists from several ASEAN countries recently met in Jakarta to further develop the HRRCA concept.

19. (C) Indonesia is playing a key role in support of the HRRCA. The University of Indonesia is now the leading candidate to host the HRRCA although Singapore's Nanyang Technological University is also expected to make a bid. Indonesian government officials are lending quiet support to this effort according to David Cohen, a human rights law expert from the University of California who is advising the Secretariat on the matter. He told poloff that officials from DEPLU and from Indonesia's Ministry of Law and Human Rights were working closely with the Indonesian non-governmental experts involved in the HRRCA. However, the GOI insisted on keeping this support low-key so as to not undermine the HRRCA's track-two character. The HRRCA steering group will meet again September 3-4 and hopes to launch the center sometime in November.

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